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# Kozy with the Klan

The mainstream media downplay or ignore the many demonstrations that progressive forces have launched against war and social injustice. But not all demonstrators are slighted. Since the early 1970s, when the press first started announcing that the country was in a "conservative mood," the Ku Klux Klan has been accorded generous coverage. Lengthy and not altogether unsympathetic articles have appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post, Associated Press, Time, Newsweek and other publications. Klan leaders, skinheads, and other hatemongers have appeared on just about every local and national TV talk show. Indeed, the Klan and the media have often seemed entwined in a cozy embrace. The press also displays a partiality toward ultra-right political candidates. Nazi-Klansman David Duke received more national media running for a seat in the Louisiania state legislature than did socialist Bernard Sanders running for the U.S. Congress in Vermont and *winning*. Likewise, right-wing presidential candidates Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot received immediate and lavish media attention upon announcing their intentions, while the progressive Senator Tom Harkin remained unseen and largely unmentioned from day one of his campaign. The corporate media have a soft spot for right-wingers and for hatemongers like the KKK.

Do we want the press to cover or ignore the Klan? The question is poorly put. We certainly want people to be informed about the menace posed by hate groups like the KKK and the American Nazi Party, but we also do not want the media to become promotional weapons for fascists and racists. So the question is not how much coverage but the kind of coverage. Here are some specific criticisms:

1. The press regularly fails to report the Klan's worst features, saying almost nothing in depth about its racism, fascism, anticommunism and anti-Semitism, and almost nothing about its history of violence, arson, terrorism, murder and lynching. Some of that history is not far past: in the last fifteen years at least nine persons have died at the hands of Klan members, while scores have been harassed, intimidated, or injured.

2. The press has lavished attention on the Klan and Nazis, thereby magnifying their visibility and exaggerating their strength and importance. Ten demonstrators marching for some progressive cause would not win national media attention, but Klan and Nazi gatherings of that size have been treated as big news. When the Klan held a much-publicized rally just outside Washington, D.C. in Montgomery County, Maryland, numbering all of twenty-four individuals in robes, 140 media people were there to transmit the event to national audiences. The *Nashville Tennessean* once ran a nine-part series on the Klan. The series mentioned that

the KKK had "a dangerous potential for violence and terror," but it never elucidated the nature of that potential nor mentioned any specific acts. However, it did offer a generous sampling of the Klan's racist opinions. Gannett news service quickly shot the story over the wires and all three major networks reported it. As a result, the Klan's "Imperial Wizard," who liked the articles, started receiving letters from people asking how they could join. (The *Tennessean* had conveniently published his address.)

3. The press downplays the anti-Klan demonstrators whose numbers are many times larger than KKK participants. The political statement that anti-Klan demonstrators make on behalf of social justice and against racism is usually ignored by the press. The public is left to conclude that they are just hecklers spoiling for a fight. Andy Stapp, an activist with the Workers World Party, offers some instances of double-standard reporting:

- Anti-Klan demonstrators outnumbered the fascists ten to one at a KKK rally in Connecticut, but CBS, ABC and NBC all focused their cameras on the Klan.
- Fifty Klansmen parading from Selma to Montgomery drew national attention while 500 [civil rights advocates] marching against racism (67 of whom were arrested) from Savannah to Reidsville prison the same week were virtually censored out of the news.
- Ten armed KKK terrorists rate a six-column article and a large picture in the New York Times, the same newspaper which printed *not one word* about the 350,000 Black and White people who demonstrated together [for affirmative action and civil rights] in Washington, DC, the capital of the U.S.

4. The press has no unkind words about how police and government agents collaborate with the Klan and the Nazis, as when police attack anti-Klan protesters, and undercover agents—who supposedly infiltrate the KKK to keep an eye on it—end up playing key organizing roles. One investigation revealed that most of the Klan chapters in certain parts of the South were organized and financed by the FBI. Back in November 1979, a group of Klansmen and Nazis murdered five Communist Workers Party leaders and wounded nine others at an anti-Klan rally in Greensboro, N.C. The role played by undercover agents in organizing and arming the Greensboro terrorists remained a story much neglected by the major news media.

The media usually label communists and socialists as the "extreme left" and equate them with the extreme right of Nazis and Klansmen— which is tantamount to equating those who oppose racism, anti-Semitism and union-busting with those who support such things. The left "extremists," however, do not get the kind of lavish media exposure accorded the Klan. Thus, for years Charlene Mitchell and Angela Davis headed a very active multi-racial organization known as the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression. But most people, including many on the left, never heard of the organization even though one of its leaders was a nationally known figure. Like other anti-racist groups the NAARPR suffered from a severe case of media blackout. Fighting racism simply is not news. Advocating and practicing racism *is* news.

Nazis and Klanspeople may be racist and violent but they are not anti-capitalist—which might explain why the corporate press treats them so well. Indeed, throughout much of its history the Klan functioned as a union-busting organization—as did the Nazis in Germany in the early 1930s. Both the Nazi party and the Klan are explicitly anticommunist and anti-socialist. At a demonstration in Springfield, Massachusetts the Klan distributed a leaflet denouncing the "Black Socialist Democratic People's Government" which it claimed was plotting to overthrow

"White America." The Klan conjures up imaginary threats to explain away real social problems, attempting to divide people along racial lines by transforming their legitimate economic grievances into a hatred of Blacks, Jews, trade unionists, communists, welfare recipients, and advocates of affirmative action. David Duke is correct: his political agenda is really not that different from George Bush's.

The media's coverage of the Klan and the far Right in general over the last twenty years has done its part to keep conservative forces in an ascendant mode. The press gives maximum exposure to the Klanspeople, Nazis, skinheads, hatemongers, David Dukes, Pat Buchanans—all of which widens the rightward range of visible discourse for the George Bushes. Of course, the media do not see it that way. They believe they just go out and get the story. Were they to join in the battle against racism, they would, by their view, be guilty of "advocacy journalism." So instead of exposing hate groups the press gives exposure .to. hate groups. It's called "objectivity."

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